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A-ONE #0415   04/12/02

    ~ Napster Buyout Planned ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Undercover Magascene!

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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""

I really do want that lost hour of sleep back!! Daylight Savings Time is
great in the fall when I get an extra hour, but I sure miss it when it turns
the other way in the spring. The only good part of all this is that the sun
is out longer and we can enjoy daylight all the more. Yes, spring is
finally getting here! I think that if we have some nice weather this
weekend, I'll start my spring outdoor cleanup routine. Time to get the
gardens and lawn ready for the new season. Joe's favorite pastime! <vbg>

Y'know, there are a couple of news articles that I've included in this
week's issue that bother me. Internet fraud. Yes, fraud is disheartening
no matter what the source, but some of it is just plain obvious that I'm
amazed that people get duped. According to the FBI, online auction fraud is
the biggest scam today. Surprised? Not me. Online sales have been a
mainstay online ever since I can first remember being online during my
earliest BBS days. Even back then, sellers got screwed just as much as
buyers. However, I bet the buyers got it worse. Nothing has changed
although the activity has grown.

What the internet and e-mail has helped to do is vastly enlarge the target
audience. There are tons of programs out there just combing the web and
newsgroups gathering e-mail addresses - for legitimate business uses as well
as spammers and potential fraud uses. But some of the things I've seen on
the web and in my e-mail in-box is so incredulous that I cannot fathom how
someone could actually fall for them. But they do.

It's ironic that one of the stories that appears this week I received in
e-mail earlier this week. This is the one from some deposed mucky-muck from
Nigeria looking to move cash from Nigeria to U.S. banks because the Nigerian
government is corrupt and they fear the cash will be stolen. The e-mail
seeks people to help this process by providing bank information to aid the
ability to move the money. In return for the slight inconvenience, the
supporter is promised 10 percent. What about this proposal doesn't
instantaneously ring an alarm in one's brain?

First of all, who in their right mind would seek anonymous people to entrust
large sums of money, AND expect to ever see it again? Are people really
that gullible? Well, obviously so. Sure, give me access to your bank
account so I can deposit large sums of money. Yeah, right! I almost don't
feel sorry for these people who are scammed like this. And the "my mother,
child, pet, you-fill-in-the-blank is dying so please send me money to get
the one operation that will save his/her life" scam. Could it be true?

Sure it could. But you won't see me sending any money because the chances
of it being a scam is much higher. In fact, it's almost a guarantee.

Word of advice: if you have a heart of gold - and bless you if you're that
type of a person - do some research and check into the plea. Don't send
money blindly - you'll likely be throwing it away. If something is too
good, or too sad, to be true, it probably is.

Until next time...

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                       Octopus BBS Modifications

Mark Duckworth has announced:

I have acquired the source code to Koos Kuil's excellent Octopus BBS.
Included already are special features for MiNT. I am adding features
for MagiC and most importantly adding internet server support. What
this means is that rather than suffering long distance fees and a wasted
phone line, atarians will be able to "dial" atari BBS's running Octopus
through a simple telnet client. Currently my progress has gotten to the
point where I have patched octopus code to allow for some miscellaneous
changes, I added support for the new configuration options in the main
octopus config file and it can now detect a connection attempt and send
out characters using STiK. Support will be implemented for MiNTnet as
well as NOS networking so that people may run this on their MiNT
web servers in addition to other stuff.

For those who don't know, Octopus BBS is a fantastic bbs package by Koos
Kuil released as Shareware. I cannot release the source code (maybe just
not yet) or binaries of my changes yet, but I am in negotiations.
Hopefully Octopus will become open source (GNU GPL), though I don't know
as Koos seems to think 2 years of his life coding is important to him ;-)
I can understand that.

Any way around it, Octopus BBS is sure to have maintenance and a new
maintainer and should become the current BBS package of choice for
Atarians! ;-)

News and updates available at atari-source.com

Screen shot available at
http://pikachu.atari-source.com/octoshot/octoshot1.gif

                    New Version of 8-bit CD Audio Player

Mathy van Nisselroy has announced:

I just put the latest version of my CD audio player on my website at
http://www-users.rwth-aachen.de/mathy.van_nisselroy

If you could please test the 'O' command, which should now work each
time as it should with tray, caddy and slot-in CD-ROM mechanisms. If
you have a CD with or then 48 but less then 73 tracks, please test if
the right track shows up when the software is started. Please read the
textfile. It explains in more detail how to use CDAP.

CU   Mathy van Nisselroy

SCSI Ethernet For Atari Now Reality

Anodyne software has created drivers for the Daynaport SCSI ethernet
cards. The cards and drivers are suitable for Atari TT and Falcon, and
also for ST's with a SCSI adapter capable of bus arbitration.

This is indeed good news for those wanting a quick ethernet solution for
their Falcon. However, the drivers are only available for Sting and not
for MiNTNet/MagiCNet, which drastically reduces the usability for many
people. However such drivers are expected shortly.

http://www.anodynesoftware.com/ethernet/main.htm

Undercover Magascene Issue 22

The Sirius Cybernetics Corporation released a new issue of their Atari
ST diskmag today. UCM should run with any ST/e or Falcon.

http://www.dhs.nu/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Sorry for missing the deadline last
week, but as Dana said, we (I) experienced a technical glitch. I still
don't understand WHY, but the file I sent to Dana didn't get there.
It's happened once or twice before, but we've always connected in time
to get it fixed before the issue went out. Not so this time.

There really isn't much going on for me this week other than the same
old stuff. You know... work, work, work.

I know that I'm not unique in that respect, but that doesn't usually
help much, does it? We live in an age where everything is "faster,
faster, faster". It used to be that it took months for news of events
to make it around the world. Now news makes it around the world before
it IS news, and we have the ability to react to it just as quickly...

often before the dust has settled and all the facts are known.

And sometimes, even when all the facts are known, we just keep rushing toward the proverbial cliff like a herd of lemmings. Global warming, fighting in the middle east, Microsoft's monopoly, fighting in the middle east, taxes, fighting in the middle east... well, you get the idea.

I really try not to take sides publicly about subjects with such deep feelings, but I can't help but think that everyone in the middle east needs to just stop for a moment and take stock of what they really want... and what they stand to lose.

Without taking sides on the issue, I think that both sides have stepped over the line. My take on the situation is that they have forgotten how NOT to hate. With so much history and culture between them, it's a shame that they cannot find a way to, if not accept each other, at least allow each other to exist.

One thing that I HAVE noticed (and am willing to point out) is that even though people all over the world (not all people everywhere, but SOME people everywhere) like to complain about the United States butting in, but it's usually us that gets asked to help out when there's a problem. And it's not just stuff like what's going on in the middle east right now, it's floods, droughts, famines, disease outbreaks, and all the other things that fate throws at us. And, unless you've really pissed us off recently, we're there without reservation.

Okay, okay, I'm going to step down off of the soapbox and get to the reason for this column. Let's get to it.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Steve Marshall asks about converting Atari stuff over to be run on an emulator:

"What's the best tool to use to convert my Atari disk for use with the PC emulator. (I've got Winston but am trying out Steem just now too).

I've got Makedisk but I'm having problems getting the disk recognized.

Is there somewhere to download Starball and Cybernetix? I've found info about these programs but not the actual programs."

Paul Caillet tells Steve:

"I don't know if it's the best, but this the one that I use very easily:

Windows Floppy Disk Copy 1.02
http://music-atari.org/atari/emul/diskutil.htm

There are many other disk utilities on this Web page."

Steve tells Paul:

"Thanks. I still had problems with that one. I guess it may
be the disk format or something. I'll have to get the real
machine out and see if a fresh disk helps."

Tim Anderson tells us that he...

"Should be picking up my TT in a few days and am hoping to justify the
purchase to the wife. She has not seen much but was very impressed by
the Falcon till it died!!

Any ideas what I can get for this new machine to really show it off?"

Mark Duckworth tells Tim:

"Browse the web, play in Papyrus, do anything that shows her just how
fast the TT is."

Mickael Pointier adds:

"Try to find the 3D demo that was presented at the "Forum Atari" in
Paris around 1990, made by Zarathoustra (Pascal de France) and M-Coder
(Jean Charles Merignac).

It's in 640x480 256 colors, real time (can move the objects using the
mouse) and totally kick ass."

Steve Marshall asks about one of my favorite ST games:

"Anywhere I can download STarBall?
It was shareware and one of the best games for the Atari.
Another one I'm after is Cybernetix.

I've found info about these but never found a file to
download."

Gregory George tells Steve:

"Ok. I've dug the .MSA version out of my archives. Hope this works for
you:

http://home.att.net/~ataritimes/starball.zip "

Dan Ackerman adds:

"You can find it here

http://www.umich.edu/~archive/atari/Games/

Directly at

http://www.umich.edu/~archive/atari/Games/starball.zip

Would be cool if we could get the original author to open source it.
The PC version he made in 95, must be pretty much dead by now..."

Lyndon Amsdon posts this about 'EtherNEC':

"This is a device to allow you to connect an Atari to an ISA
NE2000 network card. This comes after working with Dr. Thomas

Redelberger. It connects to the ROM port, or cartridge port as
some people call it. Stacks supported are Sting, Magicnet and
Mintnet.

Please see my website for details, things will take some time
first of all as I have little capital and stock but hopefully
the profits from first will go to making more and so on.

http://hardware.atari.org/ether/index.htm

If you want to create your own boards (GNU), read up on the
drivers or know how the hardware works please see:

http://home.arcor.de/thomas.redelberger/index.htm "

Tim Anderson tells Lyndon:

"And it's a nice price to.

You can bet when I get my new Atari this will be one of my first
purchases."

Hallvard tells Lyndon:

"That's excellent! I wish you all the best with your production of
these. Will there be a similar card available later which doesn't use
the cartridge port, but connects inside the machine etc?

My cartridge port is fully occupied with MIDI related expansion devices.
I believe I came across a similar interface as you're describing which
connects to the hard disk (ACSI) port, but there was only a schematic
available, not a complete PCB layout.

Can't remember on top of my head where I found it, but you've probably
found it as well.

Will something like this be available from you, or the PCB layout be
made available for us DIYers?"

Lyndon tells Hallvard:

"Thanks. I have started on an ISA controller. I think I had the
ET4000 working. I got the monitor syncing to it but the test
picture in VMG-4000 wasn't appearing. Anyway, this ISA
controller should support Network cards too, as long as I modify
driver to point to different area in memory map (and a few other
minor changes).

Yes, that (an ASCI version) was Thomas's first project. I wanted
Ethernet on a Falcon, which doesn't have ACSI port. I approached him
about changing driver/hardware to work from ROM port and things went
on from there :)

Elmar Hilgert has/is done the PCB layout for EtherNEA, the ACSI
version. I don't know what has happened to that.

It's GNU! The source for drivers is open, the hardware is open
too. All the images are available on Thomas's website in the
package, along with that ACSI version you mentioned.

http://home.arcor.de/thomas.redelberger/index.htm "

Brian Van Tilborg asks an on-point question or two:

"Ok, I am all pumped regarding the ethernet solution. I have a few
questions.

1) Is this solution relatively fast? A benchmark I can understand would
be nice.

2) I want to hook up a number of my Ataris, however, they are all
running different OS.

2a) My Falcon just isn't Magic Friendly for whatever reason. And I
haven't installed Mint or Mintnet, but run Geneva or Straight TOS and
STing.

2b) My TT Runs mainly Magic 4.0 and Sting or PPP Iconnect. I want to
run Magicnet, however, one of the instructions suggests that the OS handle
long file names. Is this absolutely required? I am lazy and really don't
want to update to a newer version of Magic.

2c) I use some Standard STs with 2.5 to 4 meg of ram, however, even with
Magic/Nvdi running some programs eats up the memory fast, so sometimes I
run Single Tos and Sting. So.....

Can I network, Atari Computers running STING and MagicNet, together,
and/or include Magicnet and Mintnet driven computers in the network? As I
may get another TT with Mint on it?

In a worst Case Scenario, I know I can network Sting, but I am very much
aware that Mintnet and Magicnet are much faster and possibly more reliable.

Also, is the PPP/Iconnect solution pretty much isolated with regards to
network solutions? Am I stuck with this as a solitary dial-up solution?

The reason I am saying this, is that currently my home doesn't have and
won't have Cable access. Therefore the ethernet solution be used only
for the local network.

I believe both Sting and Mintnet, (probably magicnet too) have masking
and remote dialing, unlike Iconnect.

And now for something completely silly.

There are network hubs that have Ethernet and (DSL?) High speed phone
access, combined in one unit. I don't know if these are independent or
what.

Can I hook up an ethernet solution to this Hub?

(1) can I do this at all,

(2) If I can do this, is their a possibility for the High Speed
Phoneline access. As this is a possibility in my area.

I am looking for an "Atari" solution, however, perhaps I may have to
buy a Windows driven computer and use it for the High Speed Internet
connection."

Rod Smith tells Brian:

"You're probably thinking of broadband routers -- things like the Linksys BEFSR41 or NetGear RT-314. These devices function as network routers (albeit very simple ones compared to what ISPs and backbone operators run), and they often include hubs or switches so you can link multiple computers to your broadband modem. They typically use a tool called Network Address Translation (NAT) to let you run multiple computers on one external IP address.

> Can I hook up an ethernet solution to this Hub

Yes. In fact, with several computers, you'd need a hub or switch to link them all, assuming you're using recent twisted-pair wiring and not ancient coaxial stuff. For local use only, this hub or switch wouldn't need to have broadband router features, though.

> (2) If I can do this, is their a possibility for the High Speed
> Phoneline access. As this is a possibility in my area.

Yes. If Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) is available, it should work via a broadband router to provide your STs with Internet access, once you've added Ethernet and TCP/IP to the STs. (I'm basing this statement on solid networking principles, though, not actual knowledge. I'd be shocked if a working ST TCP/IP stack did NOT work for DSL access via a working broadband router, though.) In fact, many DSL providers use a protocol called PPPoE to assign IP addresses. I don't know if any of the ST stacks support this. If not, a broadband router (or a computer running some other OS configured to do the job) would be the only way to link an ST to such an ISP. Also, some ISPs may get obnoxious if you have problems under anything but Windows, but you probably already figured that....

> I am looking for an "Atari" solution, however, perhaps I may have to
> buy a Windows driven computer and use it for the High Speed Internet
> connection.

Nah. Personally, I use a ZyXEL P-314 (the OEM version of the NetGear RT-314) on a cable modem, and it works flawlessly with quite a zoo of OSs, to which I expect to add an Atari TT soon."

Lonny Pursell adds:

"PPPoE is not available unless some major coding break thru has happened recently.

There is a DHCP client for MiNT-Net, it might be beta and I've not tested it myself. I got lucky and my ISP has static IP, however I bought a D-Link DI-704 so I could connect more than one machine."

Jo Even Skarstein adds:

"I don't have any benchmark results right here, but on my Milan with a PCI ethernet card and MiNTnet, I get around 700-750Kb/s on my 10Mbps network.

My Falcon/Afterburner with Elmar Hilgarts ROMport adapter and MiNTnet is a lot slower, around 100Kb/s IIRC. My TT with the same adapter is equally fast with MiNTnet and slightly slower with STiNG/MagiC.

However, STiNG seems to slow down the system a lot at this speed. I haven't tried Magxnet on my TT yet, but from what I've heard it should be about as fast as MiNTnet.

I'm afraid I can't answer (about the need for long filename support), as I don't know enough about Magxnet.

Putting Atari computers with StiNG or MagicNet is no problem. STiNG, MiNTnet and Magxnet all use TCP/IP, so you can mix and match as long as you set up the network properly. With the exception of Magxnet (well, I have used it slightly, but that was an experimental version a long time ago) I've used all of these with success. I even have a few Windows machines in the same network, works great.

I don't think I've had any problems with STiNG being unreliable, but it doesn't perform nearly as well as MiNTnet.

IConnect is modem only. It can't even handle null modem-connections.

Don't know about IConnect, but both STiNG and MiNTnet have it. I used it for a long time with great success. Had the modem connected to my Falcon running MiNTnet, and my TT and STacy running STiNG or MiNTnet (depending on what OS it booted) connected to the LAN."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Japan Xbox Lags, Games Strong?
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Xbox Momentum Slowing?!
                                     EverQuest For PS2!
                                     And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                 Microsoft Says Japan Xbox Lags, Games Strong

Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox video game console is not selling as well as expected in Japan, though the software giant says customers there and around the world are buying more games than they did for Sony Corp.'s rival PlayStation 2.

"Japan is going well on the software side and probably is a little behind where we want to be on the hardware side," Xbox director Robbie Bach told Reuters in an interview.

"But we always expected things would be tough. Microsoft has demonstrated patience and persistence there before and I think we will do very well," Bach said.

Bach declined to give specific sales figures or comment on a gaming magazine report last week that said the Xbox had seen a slow start in Japan, with sales of just over 190,000 units since its Feb. 22 launch.

By contrast, Sony's market-leading PlayStation 2 sold 980,000 units in just three days when it launched in Japan in March 2000.

However, Bach pointed to software sales as evidence that the Xbox was gaining popularity around the world.

Game sales are crucial because they are highly profitable, unlike the Xbox hardware, which Microsoft sells below cost in order to keep consumer prices down.

Japanese customers had bought an average of 1.6 games per Xbox so far, compared to one game per PlayStation 2 at the same point after its release, Bach said.

Bach said he was confident Japanese game developers, many of whom are said to be highly suspicious or even hostile to Microsoft as it tries to crack a market dominated by Japanese firms, would eventually fully support the Xbox.

"We're seeing lot of strong support there. We expect our relationships there to grow. It's not something you can jump in, and in three weeks you have great relations with everyone. It takes three months, or three years," Bach said. "There is still more work to do in Japan."

In the United States, where the Xbox debuted last November, customers had so far bought an average of 3.8 games, while in Europe, where the console launched about three weeks ago, they had bought 2.3 titles, Bach said.

"It really speaks to the strength of the games, the breadth of content, and in the end it really is all about the games," Bach said.

Moreover, the Xbox's premier game, a science fiction combat title called "Halo", had now sold 1 million copies worldwide, reaching that mark about twice as fast as the top PlayStation 2 game, Bach said.

The second-biggest seller was street racing game "Project Gotham", with about 500,000 units sold, while martial arts fighting title "Dead or Alive 3" was in third place, with sales of about 400,000, Bach said.

However, the video game market was expected to slow in the middle of the year before getting its seasonal boost in the fall as the industry starts building buzz heading into the holidays, Bach said.

Microsoft would preview several upcoming games at the main video game industry trade show in May, as well as reveal some of its plans for starting launching online gaming, Bach said.

"The critical next step for us is scaling the platform from being a successful launch to being a broad-based success with a big installed base," Bach said. "The second thing ... is our online plans. That should be very very infesting. We have some fun things to talk about, some fun things to show."

Analysts Say Xbox Manufacturing Momentum Slowing

Microsoft Corp. may be falling behind on its fiscal-year shipment targets for the Xbox, according to two Wall Street analysts who cover the manufacturer of the video game console.

One of the analysts, Chris Whitmore of Deutsche Banc Alex. Brown, said on Tuesday that part of the problem came from weaker than expected sales of the $299 console at the consumer level.

The Xbox debuted in the U.S. last November, in Japan in February and in Europe in March. Flextronics International Ltd. manufactures it for all three regions under a contract analysts have said could be worth at least $1 billion a year.

Analysts said on Tuesday that production has slowed, jeopardizing Microsoft's target of shipping 4.5 million to 6 million units worldwide by June 30, the end of the software giant's fiscal year.

The slowdown also hurts Flextronics, which Whitmore said books revenue as the video game players leave the production floor.

"Xbox momentum is slowing from an easy start," Banc of America Securities analyst Paul Fox wrote in a note to clients.

That factor, coupled with trouble with customers in the optical networking business, could make Flextronics' near-term revenue growth plans difficult to achieve, he added.

"This time of year is historically a slower time for console and game sales, so we're watching the market carefully and taking slight measures to best manage supply," said James Bernard, a spokesman for Xbox.

Bernard declined to discuss specific numbers, citing Microsoft's upcoming quarterly earnings report. He said, however, that sales are expected to track "usual business cycles," and the company is happy with the console's numbers thus far.

While Microsoft has claimed strong sales for the Xbox in the United States, at least in its initial holiday season, the company has admitted it is not meeting expectations in Japan, a market where it was expected to have difficulty.

"Japan is going well on the software side and probably is a little behind where we want to be on the hardware side," Xbox director Robbie Bach told Reuters last week.

In its regular global video game survey last week, Goldman Sachs said U.S. retailers showed a "surprisingly clear" preference for Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2 over the Xbox.

Sony Division to Develop 'EverQuest' for PS2

The U.S. online game arm of Sony Corp. said on Tuesday it plans to put its popular PC game "EverQuest" on Sony's PlayStation 2 console next year, bringing one of the best-selling game titles ever to the console.

The game likely will serve as a marquee for the PS2's new online capabilities, which will begin to roll out this summer.

The plans mark a milestone of sorts for Sony Online Entertainment because it is the first time the online entertainment division has licensed a product to its sister company, Sony Computer Entertainment of America, which handles the PS2 in North America.

Under the agreement, Sony Online has officially become a licensed PS2 publisher, which will allow it to convert some of its other properties to the console platform.

It plans to launch "EverQuest Online Adventures" as a subscription, online-only product in spring 2003, though no monthly price has yet been set.

The PC version of EverQuest, considered by video game players to be among the 50 best electronic games ever, has more than 400,000 subscribers and has spawned multiple expansion packs. The last expansion pack sold 120,000 units on its first day.

The game, which made it debut in March 1999, is generally considered a model for successful online gaming, although it has been called addictive by some health professionals.

Still, making "EverQuest" available online should boost interest in the Web capabilities of the PS2, which has been a huge success as a video game and DVD player, but has lacked online capabilities to date.

In early March, Sony Computer Entertainment of America, also known as SCEA, announced it would release an adapter for the PS2 in August that will allow the console to connect to the Internet, either through a dial-up or broadband connection, for competitive online gaming.

At the time, SCEA said it planned to have at least a dozen titles available at launch.

The PS2 has USB expansion ports that have gone largely unused since the console was launched in November 2000, though Scott McDaniel, vice president of marketing for Sony Online Entertainment, said the new EverQuest will likely take advantage of the ports for data entry purposes.

"Arguably, you could plug a USB keyboard into it," he said. "We will be supporting that method of data entry."

The PS2 version will not be a "port" or rewrite of the PC game.

"It's completely new from the ground up," McDaniel said.

The PS2 version of "EverQuest" will be more friendly to introductory gamers than the PC version, he said.

"It is a hard game to play, to be quite honest," McDaniel said, noting that the PS2 version will have more obvious cues on how to play.

FTC Asks Video Game Business for Compliance Data

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has asked the video game industry for information on sales of mature-themed games to minors and advertising targeted at them, ahead of an expected June report by the commission on media violence, an industry group said on Thursday.

Interactive Digital Software Association head Doug Lowenstein told Reuters the request was "just more of the same" after two previous reports from the commission, which generally praised the video game business for its ratings system.

Lowenstein said the new FTC report, coming only six months after the last one, was prompted by congressional requests for an update on enforcement recommendations for the music, movie, and games businesses made in the December report.

"So the FTC is responding to that and essentially I sort of regard it as routine," Lowenstein said.

A call for comment to an FTC spokeswoman was not immediately returned.

In December, the commission made four primary suggestions for the movie, music, and games businesses: industry standards on advertising in places where a significant portion of the audience is under 17; better labeling of ratings within ads; improved self-regulation on retailer compliance; and industry sanctions for non-compliance with sales and advertising standards.

In 1994, the video game industry established the Entertainment Software Rating Board, which rates video games released in the U.S. with a suitability system ranging from "E" for "Everyone" to "M" for "Mature" and "AO" for "Adults Only."

The board has rated over 7,000 games since then, with close to 500 garnering an "M" rating, meaning that they are not intended for children under 17.

The FTC request comes as the IDSA finishes up a two-day event held on Capitol Hill to showcase games and hardware from major publishers and console makers to an audience that has traditionally been less familiar with the games business than with other media.

Lowenstein said about 1,000 people attended events held on Monday and Tuesday night, including staffers, family members, friends and at least 10 members of Congress.

"There're not a lot of events members can come to with their children," he said, adding he was having the kinds of conversations with Capitol Hill staffers now that would not have happened even five years ago because of increasing awareness among that group about the industry.

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Web Surfers Brace for Pop-up Downloads

Web surfers who thought online advertisements were becoming increasing obtrusive may be dismayed about a new tactic: pop-up downloads.

In recent weeks, some software makers have enlisted Web site operators to entice their visitors to download software rather than simply to view some advertising. For example, when visiting a site a person may receive a pop-up box that appears as a security warning with the message: "Do you accept this download?" If the consumer clicks "Yes," an application is automatically installed.

Computer security expert Richard Smith explained that with such downloads, "You don't even know why you're getting this program, and the people who do (pop-up downloads) are relying on the fact that people tend to say 'Yes.'"

"A person should request the download," he said. "It's the classic opt-in, opt-out debate."

In some cases, people are not even asked whether they want the software. It just installs on the hard drive--a particularly troublesome tactic that some have dubbed "drive-by download."

Some Net users have complained of receiving downloads containing a virus that automatically redirects them to adult-related sites. Such downloads also have been known to install new dial-up programs replacing the existing accounts. The Federal Trade Commission recently brought a case against people who were using such tactics to install a dial-up account for expensive 1-900 numbers.

But those horror stories are the exception. More typically, software makers are simply using the downloads to distribute legitimate products.

One well-known practitioner is Gator, a company that makes a helper application that manages passwords and user IDs. While many people find the software to be useful, Gator also has built in some more questionable features.

The company came under fire last year for selling ads that appeared over the top of ads already existing on major sites such as Yahoo.

While Gator later retreated from its earlier practices, about six weeks ago it turned to download advertising, called "one-click opt-install," on various partner sites.

In addition, online advertising network L90 has sold the one-click downloads on various consenting network sites. Its ad network includes AllBusiness.com, The Golf Channel online and Hollywood.com, according to

its Web site.

Ads-as-downloads are the latest ploy by software makers to help aggressively distribute technology to a wider audience. They also represent the newest twist on pop-ups and other attention-getting pitches.

In the last year and a half, Net advertising has undergone vast transformations as publishers have sought new revenue sources to make up for a sharp decline in ad dollars. As a result, ads appear bigger, obscure content for a brief time, or use sound to attract attention.

And that's just on the top sites. In less-trafficked areas of the Net, the tactics are even bolder. Some Web sites have been known to launch up to 10 pop-up pages or to use tricks such as "mousetrapping," in which the site launches multiple windows when the visitor tries to exit the page. This clutter has created a haven for pop-up downloads because consumers find it hard to determine the ad's origin.

For Gator, triggering a download via an ad boosts distribution of its wallet and bundled marketing software, the OfferCompanion. To support its free software, the company sells targeted ads to nearly 300 advertisers on OfferCompanion, which delivers price comparisons.

Gator's technologies have already been widely distributed through bundling deals with other popular applications such as WeatherBug and through direct distribution from its site. With nearly 13 million users, according to the company, it's pushing saturation, and it has sought to find new modes of distribution.

"When you hit critical mass, you don't have a lot of options...It's helping expand our reach," said Scott Eagle, marketing manager for Gator.

"We're working (directly) with publishers buying various pop-up advertising; one of them is the popping up of the (security) prompt. (It) says, 'Would you like to try this application? Click here if you do,'" said Eagle, adding that the campaign is still a small piece of the company's distribution.

Several Web publishers said they have been approached by L90 or Gator to run such download ads, but they refused out of fear of a consumer backlash.

"We thought it was dirty," said one Internet executive who asked to remain anonymous. "It's the kind of thing that makes the phone ring."

One executive referred to the download as a "warhead" because it's a small file that executes automatically and always runs in the background. The software verifies whether the computer already has the software, the system is compatible, and cookies are on.

Elliot Noss, owner of 9-year-old download site Tucows, said that though he was surprised to receive a prompt for a Gator download, he's savvy to such marketing tactics and declined to accept it. But he's not so sure a Web neophyte would know better.

"An unsophisticated user like my poor mother would have presumed it was something like a browser plug-in necessary to view the site and (would OK) the download," said Noss. "But downloading software especially for unsophisticated users can cause lots of grief and pain. Before something like a download is provided, it should be very clearly requested."

Gator's Eagle said the program is an easy way for visitors to download the software, and he emphasized that they are given the opportunity to click "No." He said the company has done extensive research to find out if this is a valuable means to install software; the results have been "overwhelmingly positive."

"There's no question that there (are) programs that are more aggressive. With this, there's some measure of permission," said Eagle.

Gator buys the ads by the thousands, but Eagle would not divulge what it pays. Sources in the ad industry say the company spends between $2 and $5 per thousand ads. Typical ad rates can run anywhere from about $7 to $20 for general rotation on a top site such as Yahoo. Gator also has affiliate relationships with many sites, which it pays $1 every time a visitor downloads its software.

Gator isn't the only software maker using this tactic to add consumers. Others advertising through downloads include Activator Download and C2 Media.

Meanwhile, InternetFuel, a marketing services company, sells creative ways for software makers to increase downloads. "Does your online business application require a download? InternetFuel can effectively market your download to the user. We offer a variety of delivery options," according to its Web site.

An L90 representative said download pop-ups have been allowed on its network. She said Gator's ad ran on its network of 150 publishers--of those that agreed--and a lower-profile set of publishers called Zonfire.

Among the sites that automatic downloads have appeared on are Innovators of Wrestling, MP3Yes.com, and the Web community site EZBoard. Such sites often launch so many pop-up windows it's hard to determine where the download originated.

A representative for the Interactive Advertising Bureau said the practice is so new that the organization could not comment specifically on it. But the representative said the IAB generally endorses practices that are clearly labeled and are not deceptive.

The IAB recently signed off on a Gator initiative, called online advertising "rules of engagement," which espoused the importance of clearly marking advertisements and the origin of ads.

"Consumers want control of their PCs," Gator President Jeff McFadden said in a statement. "They're confused as to who is responsible for displaying these high volumes of uninvited pop-ups and pop-unders, and they are becoming frustrated. This is hurting ad responsiveness and is giving a black eye to the online advertising industry."

FBI: Auction Fraud Tops Net Scam List

Online auctions account for the majority of complaints about Internet fraud, according to a new report from the FBI.

The Internet Fraud Complaint Center, a joint operation of the Federal

Bureau of Investigation and the National White Collar Crime Center, said
Wednesday that auction fraud accounted for nearly 43 percent of the
complaints received from victims and referred to law enforcement groups.

Nondeliverable merchandise and nonpayments were the next largest category,
accounting for 20.3 percent of complaints. The so-called Nigerian Letter,
a scam in which an alleged Nigerian official seeks help moving money
between bank accounts, accounted for almost 15.5 percent of the
complaints.

The IFCC, which was launched about a year ago, compiled statistics for all
of 2001, gathering some 50,000 complaints. It referred 16,755 Internet
fraud complaints to law enforcement or regulatory agencies.

The IFCC said it didn't have a total figure on how much consumers lost to
scams, but noted that victims of the Nigerian Letter scam, identity theft
and investment fraud suffered the highest dollar losses.

"Fraud committed via the Internet makes investigation and prosecution
difficult because the offender and victim may be located thousands of
miles apart," said Thomas Richardson, deputy assistant director of the
criminal investigative division of the FBI, in a release. "This borderless
phenomena is a unique characteristic of Internet crime and is not found
with many other types of traditional crime."

The FBI also doesn't see the situation improving anytime soon. The IFCC
Web site garnered almost 17.1 million hits over the past year, and
officials expect the number of complaints to rise from 1,000 a week to
1,000 a day.

"We know more Internet crime is out there, it's just a matter of victims
knowing where to go to report it and then actually reporting it," said
Richard Johnston, director of the National White Collar Crime Center, in a
statement.

                          Nigerian E-Mail Fraud Flourishes

Among 10,000 Americans who reported being suckered by online hoaxes last
year, 16 fell victim to an elaborate plot that pinged millions of e-mail
inboxes: Nigerian letter fraud.

 Those 16 reported losses of $345,000, including two unidentified people
who lost $78,000 and $74,000, respectively.

The victims represent just the tip of the iceberg of those skimmed by the
international scam, say officials with the Internet Fraud Complaint Center
in Fairmont, where the crimes were reported.

At least 20 years old, Nigerian letter fraud has been given new energy by
e-mail, which makes it easy to contact millions of people from half a world
away.

In the online version of the con, e-mails allegedly from dignitaries
representing "the Government of Nigeria" request use of the recipient's
bank account to deposit millions of dollars in money.

The "dignitaries" explain that the funds have been misappropriated by the

Nigerian government, often as over-invoiced contracts, and remain untraceable. They promise recipients can keep about 10 percent of the cash for their trouble, which includes providing bank account numbers and other personal information.

Scammers then make electronic withdrawals to clean out a victim's savings. They often also ask for upfront cash to pay for licenses, taxes, transfer fees or other nonexistent costs.

"Unfortunately, a lot of people believe this scenario could take place because of the perceptions of the government corruption in Africa," said John Kane, research manager at the National White Collar Crime Center, which runs the complaint center with the FBI.

International surveys routinely name Nigeria as the world's most corrupt country.

A recent crime center study showed that only about one in 10 people report fraud cases of any kind. Kane said a "much, much smaller fraction" of Nigerian letter fraud victims seek the attention of law enforcement.

In its first annual report, the Internet Fraud Complaint Center said this week almost 10,000 Americans last year reported losing $17.8 million in online scams.

The center channels complaints received at its Web site to more than 2,700 law enforcement or regulatory agencies around the world. International scams are reported to the U.S. Secret Service.

Of 17,000 fraud complaints, 2,600 concerned solicitations from Nigeria. That put the country at the top of those outside the United States generating complaints, followed by Canada, Romania and the United Kingdom.

Spam Throws On A Disguise

Spam's newest pitches are coming to you courtesy of friends and co-workers - or so it might seem.

In one of the latest marketing gimmicks circulating the Net, the sender comes disguised as a corporate network administrator with the subject line: "Your mailbox is over its size limit." Once opened, however, the e-mail's message lewdly invites the recipient to view adult material.

Such spam tricks are designed to make spam harder to ignore--an increasingly difficult task with skeptical consumers battling e-mail overload. As a result, commercial messages with familiar-looking origins and subject lines are becoming the norm.

"This is extremely common now," said Steve Linford, who maintains a London-based blacklist of mass e-mailers called the Spamhaus Block List. Spammers are attempting to seem familiar "because so many people are getting suspicious about the e-mail they get because they're getting flooded with spam."

Junk-mail senders are turning to new come-ons as consumers increasingly skip over messages with anonymous subject lines such as "Hi, remember me" or "Here's the information you requested." But even people on high spam

alert find it difficult to slough off messages that appear to come from the sales or support staff at the recipient's own company.

So how do spammers create such a realistic facade? They typically use software designed to carry out forgeries, filling false information such as name and e-mail address into the sender's mail client with each new attack. The software can be rigged to use the same e-mail address to send and receive a piece of junk--making it more common to view junk that appears to originate from you. It can also be used to hijack corporate domains such as cnet.com, a tactic aimed at convincing recipients that an e-mail comes from a trusted source.

The method addresses two problems for the spammer. First, the spoofed address allows the e-mail to get by corporate filters that seek to identify and block spam. Second, the message will more likely get opened by an employee who thinks it's from a co-worker.

Still, people can fight back. Linford said that in some states, such as California or Washington, deceptive spam is illegal, giving residents the right to take junk mailers to court. Most anti-spam laws prohibit mail with misleading subject lines and headers. In California, the penalty for deceptive spam is $500 per mailing.

The most difficult part of making such a case may be simply identifying the sender. Linford said that about 100 spammers produce nearly 90 percent of the junk mail sent today, but disguised addresses and other tactics make it difficult to link one of those spammers to a particular piece of mail.

Dan Birchall, executive director of advocacy group the SpamCon Foundation, suggests that recipients contact their Internet service provider to see if it is using proper filters to help stop the forgeries.

"You have to be a little bit skeptical," Birchall said.

Problems Plague eBay A Third Day

eBay had Web site problems for a third consecutive day Tuesday, with some members having difficulty logging in to their personalized "My eBay pages," the company confirmed.

The login problems affected some of the company's customers between 6:05 and 6:55 PDT Tuesday morning, the company said in a note on one of its announcement boards.

"The issue has been identified and all access restored," the company said in its note.

It was not known if the problems were related to other problems on Sunday and Monday. Further information was not available on the message boards, and eBay representatives did not return calls seeking comment.

On Sunday, customers were unable to view, bid or list items in eBay's clothing or jewelry areas for more than nine hours. On Monday, people reported that they couldn't access eBay's home page for more than an hour, and some sellers complained that their auctions had mysteriously disappeared from the Web site.

Last month, eBay suffered a 90-minute outage that affected customers' ability to reach its home page and some other pages. Later in the month, a site slowdown affected eBay users' ability to reach the site for nearly three hours.

In a note posted on its announcements board Monday, eBay acknowledged the ongoing problems and said it would send e-mail to those affected, detailing the problems and the steps it was taking to solve them. The company did not say what those problems or solutions were, saying only that they resulted in "specific issues" for different customers.

"We realize that this has been an inconvenience for our members, and we sincerely apologize," the company said in its note. "Please be patient with us as we send these emails, which we hope will answer your questions."

eBay has been continually upgrading its system since a round of multi-hour outages in 1999. The company first installed a backup system, then proceeded to move its database to a distributed architecture, with different portions of its site hosted on different servers instead of all on the same server. By distributing its systems, eBay has been able to limit the spread of problems from one area of its site to the entire site.

The San Jose, Calif.-based company is currently engaged in its "V3" upgrade, which will include real-time updates of its data and minute-by-minute updates for listings. Listings are now updated about once every hour. The company has said the upgrade was not responsible for last month's outage.

Hewlett Case Against HP-Compaq Deal OK'd for Trial

Dissident Hewlett-Packard Co. board member Walter Hewlett scored an expected minor victory on Monday when a judge allowed his claims against the computer company's merger with Compaq Computer Corp. to go forward.

Walter Hewlett claims that HP strong-armed one of its investors, Deutsche Bank, to vote in favor of the deal. A Delaware Chancery Court judge threw out HP's motion to dismiss the case, saying there are enough facts to let Hewlett's allegations go to trial.

The bar is high to have a case dismissed before both sides have a chance to probe the facts, and so the judge's ruling was widely expected by both sides.

The trial is slated to begin April 23.

"We respect the Chancellor's decision to hear the evidence on the issues that have been raised," an HP spokeswoman said. "We remain confident, particularly based on the arguments presented, that once the facts are heard we will prevail."

Hewlett and the companies are awaiting the final tally of HP shareholder votes on the largest technology deal ever, but HP said it won by a narrow margin based on early figures.

Hewlett's lawsuit alleges that HP effectively bribed Deutsche Bank by offering business in exchange for its votes. He also claims that HP misled shareholders on the progress of the merger planning.

Napster Buyout Planned, Say Reports

Bertelsmann Chief Executive Thomas Middelhoff confirmed Friday that his media conglomerate wants to take over Napster, the struggling file-swapping company it has already supported with tens of millions of dollars, according to a German report.

In an interview with German newspaper Die Welt, Middelhoff said his company plans to buy out other Napster investors. According to reports, Bertelsmann is prepared to spend up to $30 million to buy the company.

"Our solution is to take over Napster completely. We plan to buy out the former owners, most of all venture-capitalist Hummer Winblad Venture Partners and some private investors like John Fanning, who is the uncle of the founder Shawn Fanning," Middelhoff was quoted as saying in Die Welt.

Bertelsmann entered into a strategic alliance with Napster in October 2000, under which the German company gave the song-swapping service financial support to help it through its legal troubles. By September 2001, experts were estimating that Bertelsmann had spent around $100 million supporting Napster.

Rumors of a complete buyout have been circulating for some time. Last week, takeover talks were suspended after John Fanning filed a lawsuit in a Delaware court that seeks to have two of Napster's board members replaced, according to Reuters.

Napster is planning to relaunch itself as a subscription-based site, but this ambition has been hampered by its failure to reach an agreement with the record labels that sued it for copyright infringement. Last month it announced a further round of job cuts, and last week the company put its new paid service indefinitely on hold.

Middelhoff said that despite its ongoing legal battles with the record industry, Napster could become the Internet's most successful music platform ever, according to Die Welt.

Microsoft To Continue Mac Support

As a five-year agreement with Apple Computer draws to a close, Microsoft on Wednesday reiterated its support for the Macintosh.

"The agreement has ended, but our business is absolutely continuing," said Kevin Browne, head of Microsoft's Macintosh Business Unit. However, Browne did not commit to continuing support for a particular time frame.

"We'll continue this business as long as the business case makes sense," he said, speaking at Microsoft's Silicon Valley campus here.

Browne said Microsoft is focused on developing Office and Internet Explorer for the Mac, but he said the company would consider adding other titles if it does not take up too much of the software maker's resources and if the company can get a decent return for the efforts.

Microsoft is doing long-range planning, but it is only committing to one version of software at a time, Browne said.

As previously reported, Browne said Apple and Microsoft are not currently in talks to extend the five-year technology agreement, which actually ends in August.

Browne said he would be open to such a deal if it made sense, but he downplayed the importance of the deal.

"The technology agreement never has and never will define what it is we do on the Mac," Browne said. For example, he said, even when the agreement with Apple was in place, Microsoft developed software not called for under the deal, because it made sense to Microsoft's business strategy.

Phil Schiller, Apple's vice president of worldwide marketing, who was at the event, said he was pleased with Microsoft's comments and agrees with the company that a new deal is probably not necessary. "It certainly was necessary at the time," he added, referring to the commitment made five years ago.

Kid-Friendly Internet Domain Bill Heads to House Floor

An effort to create a kid-friendly Internet zone free of violence, pornography and other adult material cleared another hurdle on Wednesday when a House of Representatives panel gave its unanimous stamp of approval.

A bill approved by the committee would set up an area within the little-used ".us" Internet domain that would allow only Web sites deemed appropriate for children 12 years old and younger.

Web sites bearing a ".kids.us" address would have to certify that they did not contain sexually explicit material, hate speech, violence or other material not suitable for minors.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee approved the bill by a voice vote and sent it to the House floor for approval.

Unlike previous congressional attempts to screen out online smut, the bill would regulate content only on a corner of the Internet that falls directly under U.S. government control.

"It would be a place that parents know they can send their kids to be safe, much like a children's section of the library," said Michigan Republican Rep. Fred Upton, a bill sponsor.

Under changes incorporated into the bill on Wednesday, Web sites using the .kids.us handle could not set up chat rooms, instant messaging or other interactive services unless they could certify that they did not expose children to pedophiles or pose other risks.

Links to other Web sites outside the .kids.us subdomain would also be prohibited.

The bill represents the latest attempt to keep children away from the sexually explicit material easily available to anyone with a computer and

an Internet connection.

An early attempt, the 1996 Communications Decency Act, was thrown out by the Supreme Court as an infringement on free speech. A second, the 1998 Child Online Protection Act, remains sidelined by a court injunction.

More recently, lawmakers had hoped the global body that manages the Internet's domain-name system would set up a .kids domain alongside established domains like .com and .net.

After the Internet Corporation For Assigned Names and Numbers ICANN passed on the idea in November 2000, Massachusetts Democrat Ed Markey and Illinois Republican John Shimkus introduced a bill that would force ICANN to set up a .kids domain.

But they backed off from that plan last fall after witnesses told them it would be difficult to overrule ICANN, which is not under direct U.S. government control.

The revised bill places the .kids domain under the control of NeuStar Inc., which won the contract to manage the ".us" country-code domain last fall.

NeuStar would be expected to police the subdomain to ensure that it remained free of inappropriate content, and would answer to the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

If privately held NeuStar were to lose money on the venture, it could give control back to the Commerce Department, which would seek another operator.

NeuStar officials were not immediately available for comment.

Microsoft Judge Nixes States on Interviews, Video

Nine states pursuing the antitrust case against Microsoft Corp. suffered a setback in court on Wednesday, when the judge rejected a request to freely introduce transcripts and video of interviews with 18 Microsoft officials, including Chairman Bill Gates .

U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly said the nine states, who are seeking stiff sanctions against Microsoft, should have made their request earlier under a timetable she issued before the hearings began.

"Before the trial started, something should have been said," said Kollar-Kotelly, who is weighing what remedies should apply against Microsoft for illegally maintaining its Windows monopoly in personal computer operating systems.

A video of Gates would almost certainly prompt comparison with video played during the original Microsoft trial nearly four years ago, in which he appeared uncooperative and quibbled with government lawyers over the meaning of common words.

The judge said she would allow portions of the pre-hearing depositions to be entered during cross-examination of Microsoft employees if the material was touched on in their written testimony. She added that she might make some exceptions.

The nine states, nearing the end of their 16-witness slate, had approached
Kollar-Kotelly over the weekend seeking to introduce transcripts and play
up to an hour of video in resting their case.

Kollar-Kotelly is also considering whether to endorse a proposed
settlement of the case reached between Microsoft and the U.S. Justice
Department (news - web sites) in November.

In court on Wednesday, Microsoft lawyer John Warden objected to the
introduction of the depositions, saying the software giant would have
conducted its defense differently if it had known earlier about the
states' plan.

"There is obviously a clear prejudice when the number of witnesses more
than doubles (for the states)," Warden said.

Attorneys for the states said they misunderstood the deadline for
requesting that the depositions be entered as evidence, thinking they
could notify the court within five days of resting their case.

Five of the 18 Microsoft employees deposed ahead of the remedy hearing
were not named by Microsoft as witnesses. The states offered to drop those
five but could not sway Kollar-Kotelly.

Microsoft is expected to call its first witness next week, but it is not
clear who that will be. Both Gates and Chief Executive Steve Ballmer have
been listed among the 13 employees named as expected witness.

One of the states' key proposals is to force Microsoft to offer a
stripped-down version of Windows, with middleware like the Internet
Explorer browser and media player removed, so non-Microsoft middleware
gets a chance to compete.

Microsoft says it is technically impossible to make a modular version of
Windows, and that the states' sanctions would force it to pull the
operating system off the market.

On Wednesday, Microsoft attorney Steve Holley said the states' remedy
would confront Microsoft with another impossible task: Testing thousands
of possible versions of Windows.

Princeton University computer science professor Andrew Appel, the state's
14th witness who began testifying on Tuesday, disagrees.

Appel said Microsoft already has to test Windows' compatibility with many
different devices and software additions. He said it deals with that
problem by testing only a representative sample of them.

Holley also said the terms in the states' remedy proposal are so poorly
defined that they would be difficult to comply with. And he asked Appel
whether the requirement would cause confusion, since computer applications
would not work if some of the add-on "middleware" features in Windows were
removed.

Appel said computer makers would have an incentive to make sure different
versions of Windows on their machines ran all the applications they need
to.

"I believe a (computer manufacturer) who's trying to sell computers will
sell them in a way that somebody wants to buy them," Appel said.

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